



Town of Lexington Historical Commission

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A Guide to The Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey of Lexington

The Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey of the Town of Lexington, better known as the “Inventory,” is described below in this informational guide. The Lexington Historical Commission, a five-member, volunteer commission appointed by the Town Manager under MGL ch. 40, section 8(d), is charged by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the state historic preservation office, with the responsibility of providing a documentary record of Lexington’s historic and architectural assets: this record is the “Inventory.” For more information, see the MHC website at <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/>

The Inventory is a database of historical and architectural information about buildings, sites and structures that has been recorded on a set of standardized research forms required by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The purpose of this database is to provide a comprehensive picture of the entirety of Lexington’s development history, from isolated farm town, Revolutionary War birthplace, and railroad suburb, up through the late 20th century. It encompasses all aspects of the town’s history, not just its nationally-significant moment on April 19, 1775. Thus, newer and older buildings, buildings in better and worse condition, ordinary buildings as well as exceptional ones are inventoried.

The individual forms on which the data is compiled are prepared by professional researchers qualified in architectural history, preservation planning, history, or historical archaeology. The data collection effort is guided by national preservation standards set by the National Park Service. The resulting forms are reviewed, approved, and filed permanently with the Massachusetts Historical Commission. They are also posted on the Town’s website at <http://historicsurvey.lexingtonma.gov/index.htm#>.

Lexington’s existing Inventory was compiled over the last 38 years in four separate efforts, all undertaken by research consultants whose work was supported by grants and local appropriations voted by Town Meeting. It has been supplemented by a preliminary list of properties for which inventory forms are pending and on which historical and architectural information has not been completed (the “Priority List”).

A comprehensive cultural resources survey or inventory should encompass all of the surviving physical artifacts of a location’s human history, from archaeological sites, engineering structures, and designed or man-made landscapes, to buildings of all types

and ages. By itself, an inventory simply identifies the presence and nature of a community's "cultural resources." However, both in its original intent and in its current purpose in Lexington, the Inventory is also a planning tool. Since it was first compiled, Lexington's Inventory, and those of the other 350 cities and towns across Massachusetts, has been used to alert the Massachusetts Historical Commission and other state and federal agencies when federally or state funded projects are planned that might adversely impact a significant cultural resource. In this instance, the Inventory provides an identification function and triggers a review to determine whether mitigation strategies are needed to prevent harmful effects on that resource.

The Inventory's *local* planning role is similar, but it is more narrowly focused and provides only temporary protections. Unlike the Massachusetts Historical Commission, which can require that publicly funded projects not harm a significant cultural resource, the Lexington Historical Commission has *no* authority to permanently protect a threatened resource. The Commission's *only* role with regard to the actions of private property owners is that which it derives from locally-adopted bylaws. Since 1986, it has been the Commission's responsibility under Lexington's Demolition Delay bylaw to advise the Building Commissioner about the issuance of demolition permits for significant properties. At present, the Demolition Delay bylaw is the sole regulatory authority the Commission has been granted. Buildings in the four historic districts are not subject to the bylaw but are subject to the control of the Historic Districts Commission.

The Demolition Delay bylaw uses the Inventory as a mechanism to identify properties whose loss may be detrimental to the town's historical or architectural heritage. The Commission is charged with advising the Building Commissioner whether to delay issuance of a demolition permit when an inventoried property is determined to be both significant and preferably preserved, meaning that a moratorium on its demolition should occur to allow for consideration of preservation alternatives. These alternatives may include sympathetic alterations or enlargement of the existing structure, adaptive reuse of the existing structure, or purchase by an owner willing to preserve the structure. For more information, see "A Property Owner's Guide to Historical Commission Review."

Please contact the Historical Commission to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about your property. The Historical Commission can be reached at 781-862-0500 X-200.

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